EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT:
THE HONEYMOON IS OVER

How to get back in a committed relationship with your people

TRACOM®GROUP

THE SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE COMPANY®

Employee Engagement: A critical part of today's workforce

It's been 20 years since Employee Engagement was first introduced as a more accurate term than employee satisfaction. Executives say engagement is critical to success and organizations are spending more than ever on engagement programs. So why do engagement levels remain dismally low? And is there any reason to think we can expect better engagement in the future?

It's 2020. So it must be time to look forward or look backward. But if you look at your people you might just see a look of bewilderment or perhaps just a blank look. They're there, but are they into being there?

Many organizations are struggling to adjust to the changing competitive landscape and technological disruptions. And their people are struggling too. HR leaders and C-level executives all say that engagement is both important and directly related to performance. And organizations are investing in programs to support employees and try to improve engagement. Yet engagement rates remain extremely low. This paper considers if engagement is even possible in today's workplace and what techniques can generate it.

THE COST OF ENGAGEMENT

Gallup's research shows that only 33% of U.S. employees are engaged, while 16% are actively disengaged – they hate their jobs and organizations.[1] The other 51% are not engaged – they just show up. Further, engagement has barely budged over a 15-year span. Other countries in the research have similar percentages of unengaged workers.

When employees aren't engaged, they are going to look for new jobs. Gallup says the modern workforce considers an engaging work environment to be a "fundamental expectation, a baseline requirement." In the modern era, employees won't settle for organizations that don't prioritize engagement, and the consequences of not focusing on engagement are severe. Gallup further reports that 51% of people are either actively searching for new jobs or watching for openings. Other research has also found that high numbers of employees are looking for new jobs due to low engagement.[2]
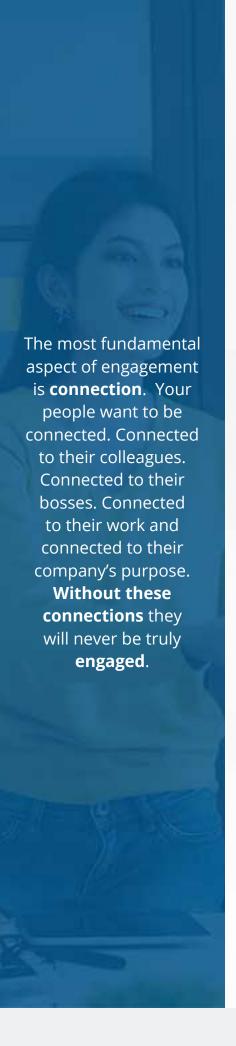
Given that employee turnover is expensive and disruptive, organizations should be doing all they can to enhance engagement and keep valued employees. Research has found that, when compared with business units in the bottom quartile of engagement, those in the top quartile have between 24% and 59% lower turnover, 41% lower absenteeism, 20% higher sales and 21% higher profitability.[1]

66%
of employees are NOT engaged, according to Gallup.[1]

51%
of people are either actively searching for new jobs or watching for openings.[1]

81%
of HR professionals say employee engagement should be a priority.[2]

90%
of HR leaders say there is solid evidence linking engagement to performance.[3]

> The most fundamental aspect of engagement is **connection**. Your people want to be connected. Connected to their colleagues. Connected to their bosses. Connected to their work and connected to their company's purpose. **Without these connections** they will never be truly **engaged**.

ENGAGEMENT: BEYOND THE SURVEY

For decades organizations have relied on employee surveys to guide their engagement efforts. Survey results drove specific initiatives that were designed to solve particular issues; for instance, developing more effective communication programs to keep employees informed, or starting corporate wellness programs to boost health and wellbeing. However, engagement is multi-faceted: there are various ways to enhance it and many reasons why it can decline. Single solutions are no longer sufficient. In the modern era organizations now need to be proactive and attack engagement from all angles, regardless of specific survey results. Most importantly, prioritizing engagement has become a business imperative and is no longer an outcome of a survey. To survive and thrive, forward-thinking organizations build engagement into their business plans.

The most fundamental aspect of engagement is connection. Your people want to be connected. Connected to their colleagues. Connected to their bosses. Connected to their work and connected to their company's purpose. Without these connections they will never be truly engaged. Building these connections may seem daunting, but is actually easier to achieve than many believe.

One effective engagement strategy endorsed by the Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM) is to train employees. They say "With the investment to teach these employees, turnover intent may lessen as workers recognize the organization's commitment to further their knowledge and skills." At its core, engaging employees involves developing them. Organizations with highly engaged workforces have comprehensive development programs – for leaders, individuals and teams.

But train them in what topics and develop what skills? Functional skills? Leadership techniques? New technologies? Training options are myriad so what training will have the greatest impact for engagement over the long-term? There is a growing recognition that developing the Social Intelligence skills of employees will most directly support employee engagement and generate long-term performance improvements. Because these skills directly impact how employees feel about their work and think about their jobs, they bolster employee engagement. Social Intelligence combines the science of how brains function and how people think, act and react to the world around us. Social Intelligence helps people recognize the naturally occuring biases and deploy strategies that can prevent these biases that are detrimental to performance and engagement.

COGNITIVE BIASES AND ENGAGEMENT

Over millennia, humans developed cognitive biases so we don't have to expend too much energy thinking about what we're doing. For example, on our daily commutes, since we know where we're going and how to get there, we are easily distracted and don't pay close attention to our driving. We allow our brains to be lazy, which conserves energy, but isn't good for our driving. Cognitive biases help us get through life on the path of least resistance. This is easy on our brains, but the side effect is that we often make mistakes and bad decisions without realizing it. By recognizing these biases we can counteract them, making better decisions, becoming more engaged and more productive. There are many biases related to individual and organizational performance, but let's look at two examples of biases directly related to employee engagement.

1. SELF-EVALUATION BIAS

When communicating and working with others, we are affected by the Self-Evaluation Bias, which influences how we see ourselves and how we interpret others' behavior. First, it causes us to see ourselves inaccurately, meaning we don't have good self-awareness of how we come across to others. Second, this bias causes us to misinterpret the actions of others; when someone does something we don't agree with, we attribute it to their personality or "character" rather than circumstances or simple behavioral style differences. This combination of poor self-awareness and misunderstanding of others creates interpersonal conflict. We fail to recognize one another's preferences for how to get things done, and we communicate and interact in ways that reflect our own needs without recognizing the preferences of others, and this leads to disengagement.

In these situations, when people feel disengaged it's often because their behavioral needs aren't understood and their strengths aren't being utilized. People are being asked to do things in ways that don't fit with their natural behavioral style. To counteract this bias, people need to become more self-aware. In fact, one of the strategies SHRM recommends to increase engagement is for leaders and employees to gain self-awareness: "At times, unconscious or even conscious biases may cloud judgment or interpretation of a situation... before acting, employees should take a moment to assess the impact their behavior may have on others and attempt to comprehend opposing viewpoints." The report goes on to state that organizations that encourage self-awareness will see positive impacts on employee problem-solving abilities and relationships.

Mitigating the Self-Evaluation Bias is as simple as learning about different behavioral patterns, called SOCIAL STYLEs. This training helps people become aware of their own behavior and how they are perceived by others. They learn about their natural strengths and how this helps in teams. They also recognize their shortcomings and how these can impede their performance and effectiveness with other team members. Critically, they learn how to recognize the SOCIAL STYLEs and strengths of other team members, and how to communicate with them in ways that lead to understanding and acceptance. This helps teams to be more effective and more collegial, which improves engagement. The behavior of leaders is especially important. If they don't model good self-awareness and recognition of others' Styles, they are in danger of having teams that are disengaged.

SOCIAL STYLE & ENGAGEMENT: CASE STUDY

Sterling Drugstores wanted better communication from its management and "a greater sense of belonging to something larger than the store in which they worked." The company's president embarked on a journey to create a culture of engagement and trained his leadership team on SOCIAL STYLE and Versatility to build an awareness of communication behaviors and "common language."

The leaders used this understanding of their behaviors to alter how they coached employees and dealt with customers. This kind of "versatile managing" helps increase support and respect from direct reports, who become more receptive to following their managers as competent, trustworthy leaders. The company's president said, "One of the reasons for the increased levels of engagement we are seeing is the fact managers are more aware of their own and others' behavioral style. They are better able to communicate with their employees on an individual basis, and this has created better teams."

2. NEGATIVITY BIAS

When change is happening rapidly and persistently, engagement can be quickly affected. When an organization is undergoing a lot of difficult change and is in turmoil, this can result in rampant negativity among employees; and since emotions are contagious, this can be a slippery slope that leads to widespread cynicism across the organization. This is dangerous because, if left unaddressed, it can lead to active disengagement, meaning people's behavior actively undermines the team and organization. Cynicism is a natural outgrowth of the Negativity Bias: our brains are hard-wired to focus more on negative than positive things. In other words, bad is stronger than good. The Negativity Bias happens automatically below our level of awareness; it affects individuals and can pervade entire teams.

The Negativity Bias can be decreased by developing resilience: research shows that people who have developed higher levels of resilience are more engaged with their work and are more committed to their organizations.[2] This is because they are more effective problem-solvers and see challenges as opportunities, rather than being paralyzed and frustrated by adversity.

Resilience training helps enhance engagement by showing people how to recognize and overcome their Negativity Bias. They do this by challenging their automatic negative thoughts, finding more productive ways to think and act during difficult times. This alters their mindset and behavior, helping them to maintain a sense of control over events. Instead of feeling paralyzed, they feel empowered, regaining control over their mindsets and actions. The course is of special benefit to leaders since it teaches them strategies that help their team to be more resilient, and also how they can model resilience and engagement.

RESILIENCE & ENGAGEMENT: CASE STUDY

syniverse®

Faced with rapid change in technology and a highly competitive global marketplace, a leading mobile communications solutions company – Syniverse – identified TRACOM's Developing a Resilient Mindset training as part of an overall employee engagement solution. The program is implemented as part of a robust initiative that also includes an onsite clinic, health coaches and measurable health goals. The objective of the program is to address not just employees' physical health, but also their mental well-being and engagement.

To ensure the tools given through training remain fresh and are being utilized, the company has set up a reinforcement program called the "Virtual Coffee Break:" a series of follow-up meetings hosted by Resilience Champions who partner with the training team to develop topics and activities that connect resiliency skills directly to the challenges employees face in their daily work-life.

SUMMARY

Levels of engagement are low for most organizations, and the pace of change has the potential to make employees even less comfortable and secure. Now, more than ever, organizations should be anticipating not only the changes on the horizon, but how these changes will affect the motivation of their workforces. The most progressive companies proactively increase engagement; by offering programs that educate people about their cognitive biases and teaching behavioral strategies to mitigate these. These Social Intelligence skills create an engaged and productive workforce. Socially Intelligent teams, companies and individuals face the same challenges as others, but they are equipped to think, act and react in more effective ways.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

Contact TRACOM to learn more about developing your own Socially Intelligent and engaged organization, or visit **tracom.com/solutions/social-intelligence/engagement-building** to find out more about our Employee Engagement programs.

1 – Gallup State of the American Workplace Study 2018.
2 – Talent Keepers Workplace America Study 2017.
3 – HR.com State of Employee Engagement Study 2019.

TRACOM® GROUP

THE SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE COMPANY®

THE TRACOM GROUP – THE SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE COMPANY – IS A WORKPLACE PERFORMANCE COMPANY AND A LEADING PROVIDER OF SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE SOLUTIONS.

Through our learning solutions, TRACOM has helped millions of people around the world to uncover hidden barriers and identify strategies that enable more positive outcomes and professional success. Our Social Intelligence solutions include learning and development programs in the areas of Mindset, Resiliency, Agility, Emotional Intelligence and Behavioral Style – all focused on helping our customers create a more engaged, productive and effective environment. Through interpersonal skills training, team development programs, sales effectiveness training, survey and assessment design, and consulting in the areas of performance management, leadership development, or employee engagement, we deliver positive, impactful solutions for our customers. Backed by years of research and proven methodology, TRACOM Group provides the "Ah Ha's" that lead to high-performance.

[WHY we do] We believe that improving peoples' understanding of themselves and others makes the world a better place.

[WHAT we do] We synthesize our discoveries into actionable learning and resources that improve an individual's performance in all parts of their lives. We call this Social Intelligence

[HOW we do it] Through research and experience we uncover the hidden barriers to individuals achieving their maximum potential and identify how to help overcome them.

TRACOM.COM | INFO@TRACOM.COM | 303-470-4900